

OPENING STATEMENT
DAVID MUIR, CHAIR OF THE CLEM JONES GROUP
SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE ACT VAD BILL
THURSDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2024

I want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to speak with you from Brisbane today.

As you will know from our submission, the Clem Jones Group has been involved in the advocacy of voluntary assisted dying laws for many years as well as efforts to overturn the federal laws banning territory VAD Bills.

Our involvement and financial support of various VAD campaigns and organisations is the result of instructions left in his will by the late Clem Jones, Brisbane's longest-serving Lord Mayor.

VAD laws now exist in all Australian states and will hopefully be available in both the ACT and Northern Territory.

A feature of the state VAD laws has been the cross-party support they have been given.

I believe we have witnessed the best of our parliamentary system in the debates on VAD laws.

Of course there have been supporters and opponents.

Sometimes opponents have resorted to myths and misinformation to press their case.

But mainly we have witnessed sensible and compassionate discussion of an issue that we recognise is a very difficult one for many lawmakers.

Yet ultimately a majority of MPs have come to the conclusion that even if they may never choose VAD for themselves, they should allow their constituents to make their own choice.

The ACT Bill is an opportunity to progress the evolution of Australian VAD laws that have been debated for decades and passed by state parliaments since 2017.

Specifically, it is a chance to deliver a law that does not prescribe a definitive time to a patient's expected death from their terminal condition.

The concept in state laws of a 12 or six-month estimated period to death has not been embraced in the ACT Bill.

While we welcome the absence of such a time frame, our submission does make some suggestions for improving the alternative criteria currently provided in the Bill.

The Bill sensibly provides for ongoing regular reviews, unlike most other states which have scheduled initial reviews but with no further reviews to follow in future years.

We suggest three-yearly reviews – not every five years – to enable a more rapid response to medical, legal, scientific, or social changes.

While our submission has pointed out a small number of elements of the Bill which we would seek to recast – such as the two I have mentioned – I must stress that overall the ACT Bill represents a workable and welcome addition to VAD regimes across our nation.

Like VAD laws elsewhere it will not cause a single extra death, but it will eliminate a lot of needless suffering for those already near death.